

## AMENDMENTS

### In the Claims:

**Please amend Claims 1-2, 4-6, and 8-11 by substituting the following:**

1. (Amended) A process apparatus including an airtight process vessel, an exhaust system for exhausting gas from the process vessel, and a baffle plate for partitioning the process vessel into a process chamber for processing an object and an exhaust passage communicating with the exhaust system,

wherein the baffle plate includes a plurality of slits through which the process chamber and the exhaust passage communicate with each other,

wherein the inner surface of each slit is tapered, said tapered surface being formed to having a depth not less than 1/4 of the thickness of the baffle plate,

wherein for each slit the opening facing the process chamber is larger than the opening facing the exhaust passage, and

wherein for each slit an angle  $\theta$  formed between the tapered surface and an axis perpendicular to the openings of the slit falls within a range from  $5^\circ$  to  $30^\circ$  [ $(5^\circ \leq \theta \leq 30^\circ)$ ].

2. (Amended) The process apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the depth of the tapered surface is formed to not less than 1/2 of the depth of the thickness of the baffle plate.

4. (Amended) The process apparatus according to claim 1, wherein each slit extends in a radial direction of the baffle plate.

5. (Amended) A process apparatus including an airtight process vessel, an exhaust system for exhausting gas from the process vessel, and a baffle plate for partitioning the process vessel into a process chamber for processing an object and an exhaust passage communicating with the exhaust system,

wherein the baffle plate includes a plurality of slits through which the process chamber and the exhaust passage communicate with each other,

wherein each slit includes an exhaust-passage opening facing the exhaust passage and a process-chamber opening facing the process chamber,

wherein said process-chamber opening includes a tapered inner surface, said tapered inner surface of the process-chamber opening formed not more than  $1/2$  of the thickness of the baffle plate, and

wherein said exhaust-passage opening includes an inner surface that is substantially perpendicular to the surface of the baffle plate, said inner surface of the exhaust-passage opening formed not more than  $1/2$  of the thickness of the baffle plate.

6. (Amended) The process apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the inner tapered surface of the process-chamber opening and the inner surface of the exhaust-passage opening are formed to having depths not less than  $1/4$  of the thickness of the baffle plate.

8. (Amended) The process apparatus according to claim 5, wherein each slit extends in a radial direction of the baffle plate, and the inner tapered surface of the process-chamber opening slopes from an opening rim of the slit, which faces the process chamber, toward the exhaust passage in which direction the opening of the slit is narrowed.

9. (Amended) The process apparatus according to claim 8, wherein the exhaust-passage opening and the process-chamber opening communicate with each other through a passage having a diameter which is not larger than the minimum diameter of the process-chamber opening that is surrounded by an inner rim of the tapered surface.

10. (Amended) The process apparatus according to claim 5, wherein for each slit an angle  $\theta$  formed between the tapered surface and an axis perpendicular to the openings of the slit falls within a range from  $5^\circ$  to  $30^\circ$ .

11. (Amended) The process apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the width  $W1$  of the process-chamber opening and the width  $W2$  of the exhaust-passage opening are set as to satisfy a condition of  $1 \leq W2/W1 \leq 1.4$ .